"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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CHAPTER IX. NO RIGHT.

THE little country town of Coleham was situated in a pleasant and hop-growing valley, about five miles from the Warren. It was composed of one long street called the Borough, and a shorter street running uphill towards a venerable castle of historic fame. Part of this ancient building was in a ruined condition, but the rest of it had been restored and was inhabited by Lord Southleigh. The town itself was very picturesque; the houses were old, and many of them were ornamented with old woodwork, and possessed high-pitched roofs and quaint bow-windows, whilst only a few of the shops, chiefly the drapers' and milliners', had ventured to make themselves fashionable by putting in large windows and pretentious doors. The greater portion of the Coleham inhabitants thought these modern improvements extremely delightful, and rewarded the enterprising tradespeople by calling their shops "handsome structures."

Happily the old-fashioned inn called "The White Doe" still kept its broad archway entrance, large courtyard, low panelled rooms, and small windows. The landlord had happily not changed the name of his house, nor had he called it a first-class hotel. Nevertheless, "The White Doe" was a highly respectable establishment, and could give, as it proposed to do, good accommodation to man and beast.

November was not a very busy time in the old town, nor was "The White Doe" overcrowded at this moment, so that when a well-dressed fashionable lady made her appearance, asking if she could be provided with two rooms, mine host hastened to offer her the two best bedrooms the house contained. They were large, low, and old-fashioned, but it must be owned that they looked a little dreary; so the lady at once ordered fires to be lighted, and then, saying that she was going out to dinner in the evening, she began to look about her with but half-disguised curiosity. When her fire had burnt up cheerfully, Mrs. Gordon unpacked her evening dress (a black silk dress which had seen much service, and had been turned and retrimmed by the skilful fingers of her daughters), and having made her simple toilet, she sat down to write a line to her eldest daughter till it was time to repair to Mr. Blackston's house.

The lawyer's family circle consisted of himself, his wife, and one daughter, whose first youth had flown, but who comforted herself by trying to cheat time, and still to be as playful at thirty as she had been at eighteen.

Mr. Blackston was an old-fashioned, courteous gentleman, sensible and business-like, not given to feeling too much the misfortunes of his fellow-men, because in his profession such misfortunes were very often to be met with. "Such is life," he would say, with a grave shake of his head, but his gravity did not go deeper than his face. His heart was serene and happy, knowing well that the balance at his banker's was large, and that his worldly affairs were most satisfactory.

But even this easy-going man had been unusually stirred by the death of the master of the Warren, and the events

which had followed. This evening, as he gave his arm to Mrs. Gordon to help her to perform the journey to the dining-room, he felt a certain curiosity as to the kind of woman he was going to deal with.

"I am very much obliged to you," began Mrs. Gordon, after a little preliminary small talk with Mrs. and Miss Blackston, "for your kindness in offering me hospitality; but I thought I should be better able to carry on at the hotel any business matters which may arise—a charming, old-fashioned place I find it."

"Oh! now, isn't it?" said Miss Blackston, with a youthful, naïve expression on the "oh."

"Yes, indeed," echoed her mother, "and such respectable people are at the head of it."

In spite of these uninteresting remarks, which continued in the same strain all through the well-appointed dinner, both the mother and daughter were eagerly scrutinising their guest, for some of the business matters about which Mrs. Gordon had come to enquire had already been whispered, in Mr. Blackston's private moments, to his admiring wife and daughter.

"To-morrow, you will perhaps not object to coming to my office, Mrs. Gordon?" said Mr. Blackston, when he had escorted that lady back to "The White Doe," which was but a few doors off. "We lawyers think business is best transacted on our own ground, but pray believe that I am entirely at your disposition."

"That person you mentioned will not fail to make her appearance to-morrow, I hope?"

"I quite expect her, but—I should like to talk the subject over with you first."

Mrs. Gordon was well pleased with her first interview between herself and this country lawyer. Evidently he was a civil, easy-going, gentlemanlike man, so that she would have, she argued, no difficulty on that side. For all this, the widow hardly slept at all that night, so full was her mind of wonderful plans for the future. What if all her difficulties were now to be made smooth? Austin would take his proper place in society, and the girls would be dowered as other girls of good position. There would be no more need for marrying for money, they might now consider rank as well. Yet she felt glad that Austin would have nothing to do with the business; it was much easier to do as she had always done — manage everything by and for herself.

Punctually to her appointment, Mrs. Gordon was ushered into Mr. Blackston's sanctum, a dingy, town room. The lawyer greeted her warmly, drew forward an old leather arm-chair near the fire, took a straight cane-seat himself, and then at once plunged into business matters.

"I have read very attentively all the letters and documents sent me by your lawyer, and as far as I can at present make out, I can see no flaw in these papers, though I must first tell you that the late Mr. Gordon, of the Warren, was my client in a very limited sense of the word. Many years ago, eighteen or twenty years, I believe, Mr. Gordon appeared in our neighbourhood as a stranger. He rented the Warren, a very pretty, old-fashioned house on the moor. He was a strange, unsociable man, known chiefly to the hunting set. A year after his arrival, however, he went away for some weeks, months perhaps, for the neighbourhood knew nothing of his exact doings, and when he was seen again, there was a rumour that he had brought back a wife. Of course, there were surmises and wonderings. There certainly was a lady at the Warren, and a household of servants; every one expected that he would take his wife about and introduce her as Mrs. Gordon, but no such thing happened. The poor lady lived a very secluded life, her husband never introduced her, never mentioned her, and it was not long before the world said it out plainly that the lady at the Warren was not Mrs. Gordon by any legal right. Several of our country gentlemen fought shy of Mr. Gordon after this, and he so resented some small insults, as he chose to call it, that he retired more than ever into private life. He turned a cold shoulder on those even who pretended to know nothing of his private affairs, and yet, for all that, never a word escaped him which could possibly have explained the facts. Two girls were born. This was known, of course, through our worthy Doctor, as kind a man as ever lived; he attended the poor lady and reported her to be a pretty, delicate creature, very shy and nervous, painfully nervous, and evidently hating the position she occupied; but even from her he never gathered that she had the right to be called Mrs. Gordon. The subject was never mentioned and she never spoke to strangers except when forced to do so.

"Dr. Smith had a great liking for the poor lady, he never could believe any

harm of her, and for several years insisted that it was for some easily explained reason that Mr. Gordon acted thus; but even the Doctor will tell you that he never was certain she was married. What reason had she for concealing the fact if she had been? The world in general said she was Mrs. Somebody else, but Dr. Smith won't have that said; besides, she was very young. Whatever was the disgrace or the mystery, the poor thing died at the birth of her second child, after two years of this seclusion at the Warren. That was all that was ever known by the outside world, though in those days many speculated about it. Hardly had she died than Mr. Gordon bought the Warren, and lived in the same manner as before. I believe the whole episode would have been forgotten had it not been for those two children. The mystery seemed to overshadow them just as it had done their mother, though after all there was but little mystery to my mind. There were the children, and Mr. Gordon acted the part of a father to them; but, of course, they were not recognised in any way by the neighbours, so that they have, I fear, grown up like nuns."

"Poor girls," murmured Mrs. Gordon, looking half shocked, half tenderly pitiful as she gently shook her head.

"Yes, indeed; it is a curious story, but especially sad for those girls. Till I received your lawyer's communications, I had no idea that I should find out the end of the sad tale. From this source, I learn that Mr. Gordon's father was a gentleman who had amassed a large fortune in India, had married a lady in that country and that one son had been born to them—the Mr. Gordon in question. The father having lost his wife, returned to England to superintend the education of his son. The two were not very compatible in temper, quarrels were frequent, and the last time that the two held any communication was when the son refused to marry a certain heiress whom Mr. Gordon had chosen to be his son's wife. The young man was told that unless he married her he would be cut off with a shilling; however, the father so far repented that he softened this threat with a command that his son was to marry the heiress or no one. Whereupon the son answered, "Then I shall marry no one." They parted, and the father lived some years longer, allowing his son a handsome allowance, however, till a rumour reached him that a lady was living at the Warren, the house Mr. Gordon junior rented, and the father, angry that his son had disobeyed him, sent a mutual acquaintance and asked him point-blank if the lady known to be living at the Warren was his lawful wife. At first the son parried the question, and then at last owned or intimated that he was not married.

"The mutual friend took the trouble to enquire about the place, found out that Mr. Gordon was not visited, repeated the confession he had heard and then left the neighbourhood. Mr. Gordon senior cared very little about public opinion, his son's affairs were not his, he said, but as long as he lived no one should be Mrs. Gordon junior, save the said heiress, who by the way was very plain, and was so afraid of being married for her money that she was constantly refusing all suitors. Mr. Gordon senior lived six years after this episode, and being fully persuaded that his son had been sufficiently punished, left him all his fortune with but one stipulation. The money was to go to his legitimate children, if he had any; if not, after his son's death, it was to pass to his distant cousin Captain Gordon, and then to his wife or their eldest son. Have I repeated the story rightly, as far as you know it, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Yes; perfectly so, except that at the time of the episode of the lady, old Mr. Gordon wrote to my husband, telling him of the contents of his will, and saying that it was his belief his son would never marry, for he was the most obstinate of men, and that as he did not wish his wealth to pass into the hands of illegitimate children, he desired to make us aware of the provisions of his will. This letter my lawyer can produce. The question remains to be answered, since that time did James Gordon ever marry? That must be ascertained."

"That can hardly be possible; he has never left the neighbourhood for long together, no lady has ever claimed the title of Mrs. James Gordon, and the poor mother of the two girls died, as I have said, six years before the elder Mr. Gordon."

"Then under that will I can rightfully claim the property," said the widow, quietly. She did not look up at the lawyer, but down on her lap, where her small black gloved hands lay lightly crossed.

"As no wife has come forward, and as we have it from the late Mr. Gordon's lips that the children are illegitimate, as far as I can see you can rightfully claim the property, and there is no one now who could dispute it."

"It is a very sad story," said Mrs. Gordon, heaving a little sigh. "I heard the particulars, as far as any one knew them, years ago, and I have often sighed over the wicked, wasted life of poor James Gordon."

"He was a very peculiar gentleman, hot-tempered, but very reserved and hard to manage. I fear too that his latter years were spent in no very good fashion, his friends were the worst set about here, and it is reported that he indulged in drink. Poor man; he was struck down in one night."

"And those—girls?" asked Mrs. Gordon, lowering her voice, as if the very thought of them overpowered her; but at the mention of "those girls," Mr. Blackston's voice altered.

"Ah! I forgot to tell you. This is the brightest side of the picture, for though he never brought them forward in any way, he never let them mix in the queer men society which found its way to the Warren, and they are charming young ladies. They had an excellent person to look after them, a stern, hard-looking, elderly female, but I believe she was most kind to the poor things."

"Poor things," echoed Mrs. Gordon again, then added in her sad voice, "This person is coming here this morning."

"Yes, I thought you had better question her yourself. I have been at the Warren a great deal lately, I have searched diligently for any papers that might clear up the mystery, but I found nothing, really nothing of importance."

"But after all the mystery is simple, is it not? James Gordon deceived some poor young woman with the promise of marrying her, and then he must have confessed that his father would not hear of it. Perhaps indeed he made no promises whatever."

"Unfortunately, as you say, madam, there could be but little mystery about it. For my part, I never saw the poor creature, but Dr. Smith always believed her to have been a lady born."

"So much the worse; but, indeed, Mr. Blackston, the chief reason of my visit here, for I cannot for any length of time easily leave my home, was to arrange something for those children. I cannot bear to think of their being turned out in the world with no one to care for them, and obliged to earn their own living without previous training. It is a very painful subject, and I wish, of course, that my daughters—the younger ones I mean—should know nothing of the sad dark page of our family history. They are too young and too innocent to be told the truth. It is better that they should hear nothing at all about it, so I wish to settle what can be done with those poor girls before we come to the place."

Several things in Mrs. Gordon's last remark had jarred on the lawyer, not because there was anything in the actual words themselves to object to, but in spite of himself his mind reverted to those young, pretty girls, so ignorant of the storm that was going to burst over them, and quite as young and innocent as were Mrs. Gordon's own tenderly nurtured daughters.

Yet he knew quite well that because they were young and pretty was no reason why they should be spared the knowledge which some day or other they must be told. Still he ventured to say:

"The second girl, Sibyl, is pretty, exceedingly pretty."

"Ah! that is very, very sad, a girl with no right to a name should not be pretty."

"But they are perfectly well brought up."

"In that case, it will be easier to settle something for them. I had thought of some school abroad, or that perhaps some German Hausfrau could be found, who would take one or both into her household, and teach them useful things. Of course, I would bear the expense till they could find some remunerative work."

"It was unpardonable of Mr. Gordon to make no provision for his daughters," said the lawyer again, not noticing the German plan. "I have looked in vain for some such provision, but he lived up to his income. I am afraid he was a selfish man from first to last."

"I fear so. Yes, he certainly should have provided for them, but I am more than willing to make up for the omission."

"I believe he meant to say something about this very subject. Poor man, on the very night of his death, he asked for paper and pen, but he had put off his last words too long, he never uttered them."

"Very strange," said Mrs. Gordon, though as she said this there stole into her heart that feeling which, though rarely expressed in words, might have been translated, "How providential that fortune favoured me, and that I can conscientiously enjoy the fruit of some one's ill-doing"; but at this moment a servant entered and announced, "Miss Evans."

CHAPTER X. AN INTERVIEW.

MISS EVANS entered; she looked taller, stiffer, and more angular than usual, or so it seemed to Mr. Blackston now he saw her contrasted with Mrs. Gordon, who, in her soft, dainty, ladylike dress, looked like the impersonification of refinement. Certainly there was nothing dainty about Nan's appearance. Her unfashionable black dress, her large, close-fitting bonnet, trimmed with plain black ribbon tied in bows under her chin, and her thick, woollen gloves, all helped to make Miss Evans in no ways "a thing of beauty." If she looked hard-featured when Grace's loving arms were round her, it cannot be wondered that she did so now that she stood in Mr. Blackston's office, summoned there to hear—what? Nan could not tell; but her guesses were not far wrong. In the presence of this elegant stranger, she looked like some gaunt block of granite just transplanted from its lonely quarry.

Mrs. Gordon's frigid little bow, unintentional as it was, made Miss Evans lift her small, piercing eyes to the stranger's face, and that one glance settled Nan's opinion of the stranger. "I hate you!" said that glance; for Nan already saw that here was the woman who was to begin the troubles of her darlings.

Mr. Blackston broke the silence.

"Good morning, Miss Evans! It is very kind of you to come at the appointed time, especially as I believe you only came back to the Warren yesterday. I hope that you left your relation in better health. Miss Grace told me that you were forced to absent yourself; but I am sure you little expected the sad event which took place in your absence."

Mr. Blackston had said all this to allow Miss Evans to collect her thoughts, for during this time he was watching her closely. He himself had but seldom seen, and very seldom spoken to, Mr. James Gordon's governess—or housekeeper, as some called her—but now she acquired special interest in his eyes as the person who had been longest at the Warren, and who, as such, could best reveal to him any secrets connected with it, supposing, of course, there were any. If he thought that it was an easy thing to make any woman tell what she knew, and that Miss Evans could be classed among the class of "any women," he was mistaken. If Miss Evans chose to be silent, no man on earth could make her speak.

"Thank you. My aunt has almost recovered her usual health," said Miss Evans, drily.

Mr. Blackston coughed.

Mrs. Gordon still sat gazing at this strange person, till she was seized with a little shiver at the bare idea of such a woman having anything to do with the bringing up of her daughters. "But of course for those poor girls it did not matter; however," she added to herself, "a less attractive woman I never béheld."

"Indeed!" continued Mr. Blackston. "I am delighted to hear you say so. Ehem! However, my object in troubling you to come here was to discuss the sad question of the future of poor Grace and Sibyl."

"Ridiculous names!" thought Mrs. Gordon.

No answer from Miss Evans, so that after a short pause the lawyer was forced to proceed without encouragement:

"You have been such a kind friend to the two sisters that Mrs. Gordon and myself naturally wish to consult you about them. What do you think would approve itself to their minds—ehem!—I mean as to their future?"

Mrs. Gordon thought this was a curious way of opening up the question, but of course said nothing.

"I hardly understand you, sir," said Miss Evans, stiffly and coldly.

Mr. Blackston was beginning to dislike his mission. He saw Miss Evans was going to resist every suggestion.

"You must know, Miss Evans, that the late Mr. James Gordon died in a very sudden and unexpected manner. He made no will—that is, none that my diligent search has been able to discover—and I fear, therefore, that he made no provision for his daughters."

Miss Evans did not answer, though had any one seen the fierce, angry look in her downcast eyes, they would, in some small measure, have guessed at the tumult in her heart.

"I suppose," continued Mr. Blackston, in desperation, "that you know of no such document existing?"

"Mr. Gordon never spoke to me of his private affairs," said Miss Evans, shortly.

"Of course not. I never thought he did—he was a very reserved man with everybody, with his daughters, too, I suppose, Miss Evans?"

The words were put in the form of a question, but Miss Evans perversely took

them as an affirmative. Mr. Blackston was beginning, in his own mind, to call the woman "an ill-tempered, stupid old maid."

"However," he continued, "the unfortunate part of the affair is, that all Mr. Gordon's money, under his late father's will, goes to a distant cousin, in fact, to the lady here present, so that your young charges are left penniless—as is, alas, most often the case of children in their very sad, unfortunate circumstances. I am taking for granted, Miss Evans, that you understand my meaning, as all the people about here know it, that is, that the late Mr. James Gordon was never married to the mother of his children—he admitted this with his own lips—and that therefore, in the eyes of the law, they have no claims whatever on their father's property.

Miss Evans bowed her head.

"I had hoped," still continued Mr. Blackston, now, however, looking across to Mrs. Gordon, who was certainly a more pleasing picture to gaze upon than Miss Evans, "I had hoped that Mr. James Gordon would have saved a yearly sum of money for his girls; but there is only enough balance at his bankers to cover the necessary expenses of his funeral, and the discharge of his debts. This being the case, I am sorry, extremely sorry, to find that those girls are left, literally, without a penny; and had the heir-at-law been any other than our kind friend Mrs. Gordon, here present, the question would have assumed a very painful and perplexing aspect. As it is, you have yourself informed me, Mrs. Gordon, that you will defray all lawful expenses till such time as a suitable provision can be found. Am I right?"

Mrs. Gordon looked up at the lawyer with a gentle smile of acquiescence.

"Yes, perfectly right; though, of course, I shall, naturally, wish to have the entire direction of the money so spent upon them. I have turned over several plans in my own mind for their future welfare, and I happen to know a lady in Germany who keeps a small school, who will, I know, make it a duty to oblige me by taking these girls either as scholars or teachers. They will thus have the advantage of learning German, that is, if teaching could be their future vocation; or, if they have had too few advantages for this to be possible, then——" and Mrs. Gordon, in spite of herself, looked at Miss Evans, whose stern, impassible face annoyed her.

Mr. Blackston could not help noticing the last innuendo, and hastened to smooth down the remark.

"Miss Evans must be a good judge of the proficiency of her pupils. I believe you have been with them many years?"

"Yes; but they have had no advantages," was Miss Evans's reply, looking up and darting a look at the widow—it was as if she were throwing back her own words at her, and acknowledging that she was, as Mrs. Gordon intimated, a commonplace, ignorant woman.

It was strange that Miss Evans should at once have declared war, metaphorically, with this ladylike, agreeable, easy mannered widow; but so it was. Mr. Blackston wanted to find out if Miss Evans knew anything more than he had told her, for, as yet, all the information had been on his side; but in vain. Although he addressed several more questions, he always received the same guarded, self-possessed answer, reminding him of the short, sharp bark of a watch-dog, till, at last, he thought it advisable to end the painful interview, and rose, saying:

"We really want your help and advice, Miss Evans, as to the best means of breaking the news to your charges. Do you think it would be best for Mrs. Gordon to explain as much as is necessary to Miss Grace, or will you undertake this delicate mission?"

But, again, Miss Evans was not prepared to promise her help, and did not presume to offer her advice. She rose, too, and, standing up in all her grim height, she said, shortly:

"All such matters must be left for the family. I was nothing but Mr. Gordon's governess; I never interfered with any private matters."

"That reminds me, Miss Evans," said Mrs. Gordon, coming forward in her usual self-possessed manner, "I shall be much obliged to you if you will tell me of any debts of which I ought to know. To yourself, for instance; for, of course, in such cases, one cannot give the usual notice; but, naturally, I should wish to pay you half a year's salary, and any back payment due to you. I mention this subject now, because I am here for a few days, and I am anxious to settle everything that I can before my return home. For instance, I should like to arrange for the departure of your charges as soon as convenient, say ten days or a fortnight—I do not wish to hurry them unduly."

"Of course not," put in the lawyer;

"but you must see these poor children yourself, Mrs. Gordon, I feel sure they will interest you. When can we come to the Warren, Miss Evans?"

But Nan's human nature could stand it no longer. "Mr. Gordon's governess" turned round sharply, muttered an inaudible answer, and walked out of the room.

"Miss Evans has a most unfortunate manner," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling, as she turned back to her arm-chair, though in her heart she was not smiling at all.

"A rough diamond!" laughed the lawyer; "but then one could not expect much polish to remain, after having lived fifteen years at that house! A beautiful place, standing in its own grounds. It is five miles distant from a town. Besides, no one ever visited the place. Would to-morrow afternoon suit you to go there, Mrs. Gordon? I shall be ready to escort you at that time. We must hunt up the title-deeds, and see that there is no flaw in your right of possession. I believe you will find the neighbourhood really sociable; but, of course, it draws a line at respectability, and poor James Gordon chose to put his foot over that line, so——"

"Ah, of course."

When Mrs. Gordon was once more in her sitting-room at the inn, she sat down and wrote a version of the scene to Frances; but she only remarked about Miss Evans, that "The poor girls have had a rough kind of old maid to bring them up, so I do not expect to find them very presentable."

OVER THE WATER.

A COMPLETE STORY.

When and how the quarrel between the villages of Hastière-le-Vaux and Hastière-par-Delà began, is more than I can say. As long as I, Michel Dumont, can remember, we on the right bank of the river at Hastière-par-Delà have had nothing whatever to do with our neighbours just across the stream at the other Hastière. Monsieur le Curé says that the ill-feeling probably arose in the old days, when the parish church on our side of the water formed part of a large convent, and the ruin on the heights behind Hastière-le-Vaux was a fortified castle. If he is right it shows that stones crumble away more quickly than human love and hate, for to this day no lad from one side of the river ever goes courting a lass on the other side; no friendly greetings are shouted from shore to shore by fishermen or washerwomen; each side has its own ferry-boat, and would rather lose half an hour of valuable time than use the wrong one; we do not even pray together, for while we hear our mass in the old parish church, the folk of Hastière-le-Vaux hear theirs in an ugly little chapel which they have built for themselves. Unluckily, the railway chose the wrong side of the water for us, and Hastière-le-Vaux is our superior as far as having the railway-station can count for superiority. The Curé has often told us that this state of feud is very wrong; but all he can say changes nothing. The old grudge seems like second nature to us, and seldom breaks out into an open quarrel.

Perhaps I ought to say, however, that I am not in a position to take what my uncle Blaise Barraud calls an impartial view of the matter, for I have lived in Hastière-par-Delà all my life, and have but little learning to help me to judge things. I have spent my time chiefly in learning my handicraft of stone-cutting, and when my day's work is over I am too tired for reading anything besides the newspaper; certainly, what I read there doesn't prove that we and our quarrel are worse than the rest of the world.

At the time of which I am going to tell I worked as foreman in old Nicolas Taelman's stone-yard, and earned really good wages; indeed, I should have been a well-to-do young fellow—as things went in Hastière—but there were my old mother and two little sisters to be provided for, and as I was the only unmarried son of the family, the heaviest share of the burden fell on my shoulders, of which I didn't complain; yet it hampered me, and kept me from saving, and from any notion of looking for a wife, even if I had wished to marry, which I didn't exactly.

I felt what a dead weight my circumstances were to me when old Taelman made up his mind to leave off work and sell his business. It seemed quite natural that after being his manager for three years I should succeed him, and I was the first he spoke to about his intentions.

"'Tain't only my age, lad, that pushes me to it," he said, "if I didn't want the money I wouldn't think of givin' in just yet; but there's my son-in-law at Liége, he's in what you may call a bit of a hobble, and some cash down I must have for him,

more than I can find just now, unless I either sell the yard or get into a hobble myself."

"Mon Dieu, Nicolas," I cried, "if you want to sell for cash down I'm not your man, worse luck. I could only manage instalments, with quite a little 'un to start with."

"Instalments won't do, my boy," he replied, slowly. "Of course, I can guess you haven't saved much, but I'd let you have it cheap. I'd give it you for three thousand francs."

"That's out of the question for me," I said; "I could no more find three thousand francs than I could make the river flow back up to Givet."

"Perhaps you couldn't yourself," Nicolas said; then he added, after a pause, "but I was thinking of Blaise Barraud, he's your mother's own brother, wouldn't he help you? He——"

"I wouldn't ask him," I interrupted; "and if I did it would be no use."

"Why, lad," asked Nicolas, "what have you against him? Is there any quarrel between you?"

"No," I said, shortly; "there's no quarrel. But for all that, I won't ask for help from him." Then I turned quickly away, for my Uncle Blaise, who was far and away the richest man in Hastière, was a sore subject with me, the more so, because a few months before, when he came back from America after thirty years' absence, I had thought, as Père Nicolas thought, that he would be sure to help his only remaining sister and her children. But I soon found that the memory of the old family quarrel which had driven him away from Hastière still rankled in his mind; moreover, that he meant to keep every sou of the fortune he had made out West for himself, or, rather, for his daughter Zoé. Besides which, he never took to me, nor I to him; and I had more than once made up my mind never to cross his threshold again, yet that was a resolve I always broke—on account of my cousin Zoé.

I say my cousin Zoé, though she was so entirely different from any other girl I had ever known, that I never felt on the same level of kinship with her as I did with my many other cousins. By her mother she was Canadian, and she did not speak French at all as we speak it. Sometimes it was hard to understand what she meant; still I liked her talk for its very strangeness. I suppose, too, it was her Canadian blood which made her so much more independent than girls are in our country, and so well able to give her opinion on matters about which women, as a rule, know little and care less, and she had no stiffness in her manner either. My mother called her forward, but I think she was more womanly than many girls who make a great show of being prim. I do not know whether or no she was pretty; she had long curved eyelashes, and large dark eyes, the like of which I have never seen before or since. Other girls' eyes have a knack of telling one more than their owners care to put into words—that is, if you are sharp at reading their glances; but Zoé's eyes were always a puzzle to me. They looked at you quite straight and simply, and yet they told you nothing. I never knew if she were pleased or vexed with me, if she were sorry for me, or if she were making fun of me.

These may seem odd reasons for being fond of a girl; but fondness is fondness, and has no reason. Something in her manner to me always made me feel shy and awkward with her, yet each time I left her I longed to see her again and to have a chance of cutting a better figure. I had got altogether into a foolish state of mind about her, for what was the use of a poor man like me wasting his thoughts on a girl who would have two hundred thousand francs for a dowry? Men of five-and-twenty, however, are not always wise; and then, you see, there was but one Zoé Barraud in all the wide world.

Of course, before my Uncle Blaise went out to America—that means before I was born—he had taken part in the feud between the two villages, as we all did; but when he came back he was very scornful at the notion of not being on sociable terms with your neighbours across the water. He said it was absolutely ridiculous and incredible that the feeling should be encouraged.

To Zoé, naturally, it was all new and strange. She asked a great many questions about the quarrel, and always ended by calling it childish and absurd.

The evening after I had had that talk with Nicolas about the stone-yard, I strolled down the road towards the house which my uncle had bought by the river, and which he was making very fine and smart within and without. I had no particular reason for going there, yet something which I did not care to confess to myself drew me that way. As I went up Barraud's garden I saw Zoé on a ladder

nailing a rose-tree against the summer-house.

"Good evening, Michel," she cried; "you can just help me a bit here. You needn't go to the house. Mother is very busy and father has gone to Dinant."

She came down the ladder and I went up it.

"It's a nice evening, cousin!" I said, that being the only thing that occurred to me of the many things I might have said.

"Very nice," she replied. "Now that bough must go over the window, and that one to the right."

I did as she bade me, and she stood watching, while I tried to find something to say to her. I found nothing, however, except "Did my uncle go to Dinant this morning or this afternoon?"

"Oh, this morning," she answered. "He had such a lot of business. He's going about the boat, for one thing."

"The boat?" I repeated. "What boat?"

"Why, don't you know? Ah, I forgot you haven't been to see us since last Sunday week. Well, father has gone to see about an authorisation for a Government ferry-boat."

"A Government ferry-boat?" I exclaimed. "What an idea! The Commune refused to have one years ago. We have Blanc's boat on this side, and the other side has Lebon."

"Yes, Michel; but Blanc and Lebon only ferry those they choose to ferry. A Government boat would be at the service of everybody."

"It might be; but no one would use it, and no one would ply it."

"My father means to work it himself," she rejoined, quietly, "if every one else is too prejudiced; and as to being used, that will come with time. You know it will be cheaper, for one thing. Blanc and Lebon charge two sous; Government only charges one."

"Was the price the reason of my uncle's application?" I asked, meaning to be sarcastic.

"Not altogether—though it's a good reason enough. Something else, however, decided him to ask. The other day he had some business to do in Brussels. He had promised to take me, and we were going by the early train. You know Lebon's boat is much more convenient for us to get to the station by than Blanc's, so we went and hailed him. We have no quarrel with Hastière-le-Vaux. Lebon came out of his house, looked at us, and turned away. Father was very angry. We had barely time to go down to Blanc's, and then up to the station. He called all this across the river, but Lebon made no sign of hearing. I felt sure we should miss the train, and that I should lose my nice long day in Brussels, when a young man who lives next door to Lebon came running out, and, before Lebon could stop him, he had jumped into the boat and come over for us. He saved us the train; but father made up his mind there and then that such a state of things should be put a stop to."

"Who was the young man?" I asked. "I'd like to know."

"His name is André Vasseur. He's a stonecutter, like yourself. He thinks the quarrel as silly as we do."

"Does he?" I retorted. "Well, he learnt his trade at Liége; he scarce belongs to Hastière. But he doesn't want to have aught to do with this side, I know."

"Well, he's been to see us since, anyhow," she said, gently. "Father's taken to him; he calls him a very intelligent man."

A sudden throb of jealousy went through me.

"I know perfectly well, Zoé," I said, "that Vasseur doesn't want to make friends across the water any more than I do."

"But he has made friends with us—with father!"

"That's another matter," I said.

"Lebon didn't seem to think so," answered my cousin.

"But young Vasseur and old Lebon are two different people," I persisted.

"Yes, so we found. Now, will you put one more nail in there, and then I think it will do? Thank you."

"You're a fool, Michel Dumont," I said to myself, half an hour later, as I walked home. "You have had no encouragement to care for the girl, and no hope of winning her yourself; then why be jealous? Moreover, how do you know he means courtship, or that she'd have him if he did? Don't find mares'-nests, Michel!"

Before long, however, every one in Hastière knew André Vasseur meant courtship, and there was a deal of talk about it.

"I thought you were after Barraud's girl?" old Taelman said to me one day. "Surely you won't let that interloper steal your chances?"

"I've no chances for him to steal," I said, sulkily. "I never was after the girl."

"Vasseur's a pushing lad," Nicolas went on, after a while. "I'll tell you what he's after, besides Barraud's Zoé. He wants to buy my business, and carry it across the water."

"You won't sell it to him?" I cried. "You'll never let the yard go like that?"

"I'd rather not," he said, slowly; "but an offer's an offer, you see, and you won't take any steps."

"How can I take steps?" I cried, impatiently. "I've no means to buy it."

"But there's Barraud," he persisted.

"I gave you an answer to that long ago," I said.

"But, lad, if you married the girl, the money'd go along with her."

"Père Nicolas," I said, "sell your yard to whom you will, but don't get such a notion as that into your head."

"And she's a good girl," he went on; but I threw down my tools and walked away.

Blaise Barraud had got the ferry-boat, but it did not answer. The only thing it did was to bring down the price of the other ferries; otherwise, all went on just the same, and if any man chanced to hail the Government boat, Blaise had to do the ferrying himself. The men who worked for him utterly refused to do it.

I went to my uncle's but little in these days. When I did go, I nearly always saw Vasseur, who was in high favour with Blaise Barraud. Zoé, too, treated him in a much more friendly manner than she treated me. Perhaps that was partly my fault, for I was never at my ease with her, which she was shrewd enough to discern; while Vasseur had a very good opinion of himself, and was sure every one shared it.

One evening he began telling my uncle about his proposal to Taelman. "He's an old fool," he added, roughly. "I offered him three thousand francs for the business; and he says it is worth five thousand."

"Five thousand francs!" exclaimed Barraud. "The old Jew! You stick to three thousand. He'll close with you."

"He won't close with you for three," I said. "He won't let his business go across the water for less than five."

I knew Zoé would despise me for saying this; but Vasseur's manner always angered me.

"I'd give him as much as he'd take on this side. A price is a price," said Barraud, "he wants the money too much to let your offer slip. He won't get another in a hurry."

"Oh, he's got a customer in his eye," went on Vasseur, looking at me significantly. "Ask your nephew if it is not so."

I felt the colour rush to my cheeks. I don't know which I felt angrier with—Nicolas for mentioning the matter to Vasseur, or Vasseur for dragging it up then.

"Mind your own business, André Vasseur," I said.

"It is my own business," he retorted, "if I want the yard, and he means to make me wait until you have a try at getting the money for it first."

"You'll be a fool, Michel," said my uncle, "if you go borrowing from Peter to pay Paul."

"No fear, uncle," I said; "I've no intention of borrowing."

"No," went on Vasseur, "Taelman spoke of a far better plan than borrowing."

"Why, what——" began my uncle, with a sharp glance from Vasseur to me.

"Monsieur André," broke in Zoé, suddenly, "I wish you had brought your violin to-night. I should like to hear if you have forgotten 'Yankee Doodle.'"

"Forgotten it!" exclaimed Vasseur, taking a very different tone. "As if I should forget anything you are so good as to teach me. You shall hear me play it to-morrow evening."

So he went there one evening after another, and I only ventured into her presence now and again; and she taught him tunes, and he always had a pretty speech ready for her, while I only made a fool of myself before her.

"Good night, all," I said, abruptly, getting up to go.

"Good night," said my uncle, without moving.

"Good night, cousin," said Zoé, giving me a long look from those strange eyes of hers.

I taxed old Taelman with having gossiped about me to Vasseur.

"I said no harm, lad," he replied, innocently. "I only told him I wanted to sell you the yard, and that I hoped you'd find the price somehow. He jeered, and said something about you and your cousin Zoé. I told him I hoped she would have you. That was all."

"Quite enough, too," I said.

After that I do not know when I should

have gone to Barraud's again, if one evening Nicolas had not asked me to go and speak to my uncle about an order he had given at the yard. I was glad to have an excuse for going. I thought I would show them all—Vasseur, too, if he were there—that I had no intention of coming as a wooer. So I didn't smarten up at all. I just went as I came out of the yard.

It was a nasty night. A bitter wind was driving from the north-east against the flow of the river, which was swollen and muddy from heavy rains.

When I got to my uncle's I found him deep in business with Maître Rollin, the notary from Dinant.

"Sit down and wait," he said, curtly, when I blundered straight into my message. "We are occupied, and Maître Rollin's train goes in half an hour."

I crossed the room and sat down by Zoé, who had scarcely looked up as I came in. I supposed she had been expecting Vasseur, and was disappointed at seeing only me.

"You haven't been here for quite a long time, Cousin Michel," she said, softly.

"I come quite as often as I'm wanted," I answered, as coolly as I could; but my heart was beating so loud that I thought she would hear it.

"You know best about that, of course, cousin," she replied.

"And I expect," I went on, "that I shall come less, after a while—not at all, in fact."

"Why?" she asked, quickly, looking full at me; "you aren't going away? Monsieur André has not bought the stone-yard?"

"Not yet; but, for all that, I think I shall go. I shall do better elsewhere."

"You are the best judge of that, too," she replied, still looking at me.

A great longing came over me to let her know why I wanted to go; but I wasn't clever at folding up my meaning so that it could be taken without being spoken out plain, and, while I was hesitating, I heard Maître Rollin saying:

"No, no, my dear Monsieur Barraud, the current is very strong to-night. I'd rather have your nephew to put me across, if he'll be so good. He's younger and stronger than you or I."

I got up mechanically, forgetting my errand, and went out with Maître Rollin.

"And when is Mademoiselle Zoé going to make up her mind?" he said, as we got into the boat.

I made as though I did not hear, and when once we were off, I had too much to do with punting across stream to talk or be talked to. It was real hard work, and when Maître Rollin had bade me good night, and had jumped ashore, I stood leaning on my pole for a few minutes, getting back my breath. As I waited, I heard some one speaking.

"Yes, yes, the boat is there," shouted Maître Rollin, in answer. "Good night, I don't want to miss the train."

"You won't—you've got ten minutes. Good night."

It was André Vasseur. I saw him through the darkness coming down to the water.

"I want to cross," he shouted.

I took no heed, but began to push off; before I could get clear, however, he had sprung into the boat.

"Who's that ferrying?" he cried, angrily. "Why did you push off when I called?"

"Because I didn't wish to do you a service, André Vasseur," I replied.

He gave a jeering laugh. "You thought you'd have a good innings with the fair Zoé," he began.

"Don't talk to me about my cousin Zoé," I cried, "nor about me to her; one thing, though, I will ask you: What did you mean, that night, about me and getting money to pay for the stone-yard?"

"You know what I meant," he said, laughing again.

"I do," I replied; "and here's what you deserve for it. Better late than never." I took my punt pole in my left hand for a moment, and drawing a step nearer to where he stood in the stern, I hit out straight from my right shoulder into his face. By the dim light I could see the blood flowing as he staggered from the blow. But he pulled himself together and prepared to pay me back. I dared not let the current master the boat, while I defended myself, so I dodged aside, and he struck with all his force into the air. The next instant there was a sharp cry—a splash—and I stood alone.

"It's my turn to laugh now," I shouted, "while you're swimming ashore."

But he made no sign of beginning to swim. Whether he could not, or whether the blow I had given him had partly stunned him, I did not know. Anyhow, I saw him sink and then come up again, and then sink again a few yards lower. As I watched him, he did not even seem to be struggling, and a terrible idea came to me.

"If he cannot swim," I thought, "so much the worse for him. I'm not to blame; let him drown." And, as I went on punting, I thought how it all would be. I would tell no one a word about it, and no one would guess what had caused his death. Suddenly the thought of Zoé rose above the vile temptation. She loved this man, I was sure; and she would lose him, and her young life would lose all its joy without a moment's warning or a word of farewell.

Before I knew what I was doing I had swung the boat round down stream. "I will spare her that," I said aloud, as if I were speaking to another man. But it was not easy to manage such a clumsy craft, and while I was doing my best to little purpose, I saw Vasseur rise again twenty yards below and then sink. If I meant to help him I must help him without the boat. I was swimmer enough not to fear for myself, so I threw off my blouse, and, with Zoé's name in my heart, I sprang after him into the icy water. I have often wondered since how I found him so quickly in that terrible perplexity of swirling currents. Find him, nevertheless, I did. He was quite unconscious, and hung like a log in my grasp. It seemed an eternity before I could get him on to my shoulder, and, when I looked for the boat, I could see her no longer. There was nothing for it but to swim ashore. How I managed that is a marvel to every one, especially to myself. There came one awful moment when I felt that all was over with me, for, as I gasped for breath, my mouth and nostrils filled with water, and, for a few seconds, I was at the mercy of the current. Then I pulled myself together for one last effort. "If we are both drowned," I thought, "perhaps she will be sorry for me, too." The next minute I felt the bottom under my feet, and, as I stepped to land with my unconscious burden, I knew that life was worth struggling for, even if I had to live it without Zoé.

The very next day, in the thick of all the talk about the accident of the night before, I told Nicolas that I had made up my mind to go to Antwerp and find work at the new docks they were building, and that he had best make his terms with Vasseur.

"You are going far enough, my lad," he said, sadly; "but if it must be, it must. I'll talk to Vasseur when he's got over his ducking."

The same evening I went to my uncle's. I thought I should be better able to make a new start when I said good-bye to Zoé. It would be like drawing a line under all that had happened that summer and autumn. I found her alone in the garden. It was a good opportunity of speaking to her; but the old shyness seized me, and I couldn't make a beginning. Nor did she wait for one.

"Michel," she cried, holding out her hands to me, "you were a brave, good man last night! Ah, cousin, you may talk of the old quarrel as much as you like, but you forgot all about it at the right moment."

"I didn't forget, Zoé," I said; "I didn't save him for his own sake—but for yours."

"For mine, Michel!" she exclaimed, with a look of wondering joy; "really for my sake?"

"Yes, Zoé; but I'd rather not talk of that—it's over and done with, I've come to talk of something else—I've come to say good-bye."

"Why, Michel? Monsieur André will never turn you out of your place now, even if he does buy the yard."

"That's nothing to do with it," I said; "I have made up my mind to go, and I mean to go."

For a moment she looked into my face, I could see there were tears in her eyes. "I mean to go," I went on—it was the look in her face that made me say this—"because I love you so dearly, Zoé."

At this she smiled.

"That's a queer reason to give, Michel," she whispered.

"It's a true one, Zoé."

"If it is true," she said, more softly still, "I should have thought it was a good reason for staying here."

"Zoé!" I cried in amazement, "you don't want me to stay? You surely don't care for me?"

"You know best, Michel, of course," she said, just as she had said it the evening before, "but remember you've never asked me."

"Well," said my uncle, when we told him, "the girl's been brought up to choose for herself, and she has sense enough to choose for herself. For my part, I had rather she took the other lad; but it's more her business than mine, so I'll make the best of it. Only mind, young man, no more talk of going away, I'm fixed at Hastière, and the girl stays with me."

That question was soon settled to his

satisfaction. My wish to go away had vanished; and when, a few weeks later, Taelman really sold his yard, it was Blaise Barraud who bought it, and I, his son-in-law, became the manager of his new speculation.

But the quarrel between the two Hastières still survives, and my children have nothing to do with the children of André Vasseur on the other side of the water.

A RUN THROUGH CORSICA.

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

AFTER a quiet night in my room at the Pieraggi, I was awakened by the factotum at half-past three in the morning, in readiness for the early train to Bastia, and in a few minutes the good man led me away with a portmanteau upon each side of him. It was the fairest day Corsica had yet shown me. The first flush of the dawn light was upon the snow on the noble crags above the town, and upon the dark velvety pines which clung to the precipices above and amid the snow. This soft coral hue against the more sombre vapour which slowly drifted by, as if dissolving under the power of the sun, was divine to see. The rivers Restonica and Tavignano tumbled along tumultuously in their common bed towards the eastern sea.

The distance between Corte and Bastia is about seventy kilometres, and the journey lasted nearly five hours. That is not a great pace. But of course we are in the mountains for the most part, ascending and descending, now between two walls of rock many hundred feet almost perpendicular, and now speeding along the side of an amphitheatre, whence we look down upon many a mile of ill-cultivated valley land, with the river Golo rushing furiously in its midst. The weather had at least done me service in the matter of the rivers and waterfalls. These were all of winter's magnitude, and roared famously from far and near.

How thinly peopled and ill-exploited the island is, to be sure! If it were a country in which the passions were kept under better control, there would be twice as many acres of grain and twice as many vineyards as one sees to-day. Specialists say that it would easily support three times the population it has. There can be little doubt that this is so. "It is because we lack hands"—"manca li bracchi"—said an old Corsican to me as I walked with him through one of the wilder parts of the country, and commented upon the vast areas of nothing but myrtle-scrub and brushwood. Perhaps he might have gone a little farther, and said also: "It is because, too, we have not enough security that we shall reap the fruits of our labour." If the bandits were cauterised from the land, Corsica might flourish. But France must bestir herself with a vengeance if she means seriously to eradicate an evil at which, for the last twenty years, she has winked, or which she has openly confessed herself powerless to remove.

There are Frenchmen of light and leading, but with a certain obliquity in their moral sense, who regard Corsica much as we regard the unfortunate beasts in our Zoological Gardens. "What! Would you have these interesting quadrupeds and birds of prey destroyed?" the enthusiastic zoologist might exclaim in wonder to the professed humanitarian who pitied them in their confinement. "Why, some of them are unique! Just think how interesting to the future generations of mankind collections such as these cannot but be! When Central Africa is settled up, there will be no wild beasts left; and students of natural history must come to these menageries for the good of their minds."

So with the cynical publicists of our day. "What," they ask, "can be more interesting than the spectacle presented by Corsica when we are about to enter the twentieth century of grace? It is a piece of mediævalism, perfectly preserved. In this little country we see the same animosities and combinations of families for protective purposes which were ordinary phases of life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries upon the Continent. There is the same reckless indifference to bloodshed, the same defiance of authority, the same love of unregenerate freedom. Why, it is simply delightful! Instead of bothering one's brains with the ponderous chronicles of Froissart and the Italian histories, one has only to cross the water a few score miles, and take up one's abode in the heart of Corsica for a few weeks or months. All the books in all the universities of the world would not enable the student to realise the condition of Europe as it was five hundred years ago so well as a common sojourn of this kind. One may thus live in an atmosphere of terrorism, murder, lawlessness, and so forth, to one's heart's content, and, after a while, return

to Paris or London with more than professorial enlightenment."

This is good satire in its way. Of course, however, the men who pretend to view Corsica as if it were really a precious picture or statue, cannot be regarded as very exemplary citizens of the world, much less as patriots. In the name of humanity, let the true spirit of progress do its work among this brave misguided people. It is bad enough to sit at a bull-fight unmoved by the torture of the horses, but it is immeasurably more brutal to wish to keep Corsica in its present state of social, political, and even domestic anarchy, in order that students of history may get an object lesson of a very emphatic and impressive kind.

A single vendetta tale of modern life will suffice to show what Corsica is like under the rule of the Republic. I borrow it from the narrative of M. Bourde, who the other day made an exhaustive enquiry into the social state of the island.

On the first of January, 1885, two youths on their way to church made a bet of a bottle of wine on the issue of a wrestling-match. They at once began the duel. One of them fell, and the other claimed the wager. It was disputed, and their altercation attracted several bystanders. In the heat of argument and passion, Orsini, one of the two, snatched a dagger from the belt of a bystander, and in a moment killed Orlanda, the arbiter of the match, because he said the wrestle ought to be repeated. Orsini is thereupon arrested and sent to prison for a few months.

The father of Orlanda, the victim, does not think such a punishment enough atonement for the loss of his son. He therefore vows vengeance upon Nicolai, the man whose dagger had killed his son; and shortly afterwards he slays him with nine stabs of a knife. This puts the families of Nicolai and Orlanda upon a first-rate footing of enmity, and the campaign of vengeance is promptly opened.

One of the Nicolai wounds a second son of Jerome Orlanda, the father of the first victim. Then two Orlanda attack three Nicolai, and kill one. For this crime the second son of Jerome above mentioned is arrested and charged. Jerome warns the Nicolai not to give evidence against his son, or he will be tenfold in earnest for fresh vengeance. But the wife of the dead Nicolai is not deterred. She goes to Bastia, and with her children in her arms, implores the jury to punish the assassin of her husband. "Justice," she cries; "they have killed an innocent man."

After this bold feat the poor woman dares to return to her native village. She is intercepted by Jerome Orlanda, and shot dead. Her daughter also, who was with her, is pursued by Jerome, and the child throws herself over a precipice to avoid the man. She is fortunately saved by some bushes, into which Jerome Orlanda fires to make sure (but does not hit her), after which he goes home contented. But his threat is deemed so far-reaching that the gravedigger dare not dig a grave for the poor woman's body. She has to be buried by stealth in the night, and the grave is dug by her relatives.

This fiend, Jerome Orlanda, survived in freedom for several months, but was eventually found dead, killed either by the gendarmes or in ordinary vendetta, it does not matter which. And so the feud exhausted itself.

Dramas of this kind would not be countenanced anywhere else in Europe. But in Corsica, where "twelve souls are not enough to avenge the deceased's boots," or it may be thought so, they are of common occurrence.

Meanwhile, we have run through the land to Bastia. The Golo, Corsica's largest river, has been with us for many a mile, hurrying its green water and foam through one rocky gorge after another. The latter part of its course is not sensational. It broadens and finds its way into the Mediterranean, through a level tract, the mere sight of which is enough to give one the premonitory symptoms of a fever.

When we turn from the coast towards Bastia, there is the glisten of a large lagoon to our right, with the white sails of fisher-boats upon it, and an infrequent palm standing against the bright background like a vignette of North Africa. Beyond is the spectral shape of Elba, from Monte Capanna, the highest point of which, Napoleon, no doubt, looked with some interest at the snow peaks of his birth island.

As significant as anything in Corsica are the sites of her inland towns and villages. They stand on hill-tops, which are themselves half fortresses, their high houses aspiring from these elevated foundations like objects fantastic and Turneresque. The inhabitants were of course thus well placed for security against pirates in the old days. Their little seaport,

some miles away, was sure to be an unimportant village, from which they could at short notice convey the valuables and residents to the mother settlement in the clouds. In later times, when pirates were not of much account, there were feuds between the citizens of one town and the citizens of its neighbour town, which made the need of walls and a strong position almost as imperative as before. The classic tale of the quarrel between the town of Borgo and that of Lucciana half a century ago is something to the point. This originated in a dead donkey which was found barring the way to the Holy Thursday procession from one of the churches. Lucciana said that Borgo had wrought this insult. Borgo put the blame upon Lucciana. And so the corpse of the ass was dragged from one town to the other, until its decomposition put an end to the strife. The men of Lucciana seem to have had the best of the affair, seeing that they succeeded in impaling the ass upon the steeple of the Borgo church.

I had no sooner driven to another "Hôtel de France," this time in Bastia, than I made preparations for getting away again. The terrible altitude of the houses of this, the earlier, capital of Corsica, outdid that of the dwellings of Ajaccio or Corte. It serves the town well enough, it may be, in the summer heats; but to the casual visitor a walk in Bastia is like a promenade in a cistern. He has to take the rest of the island on faith.

So when I had breakfasted, and made the somewhat sombre-looking waiter smile at my praises of the picturesqueness of his native island, I went straightway, knapsack in hand, to a back street, where a bruised old pale-green diligence, much ventilated by natural decay, was standing, on the point of departure for Morsiglia, many miles to the north, on the west coast of Cap Corse. This miserable old coach was my home from ten o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening.

For several hours, however, the ride was one of considerable pleasure. The road skirts the shore the whole way. The islands of Elba and Capraia lifted themselves from the water in an attractive grey haze, and the nearer sea rippled brightly where it ebbed lazily against the coast rocks.

We passed several villages, of which Brando, Santa Severa, and Mucinaggio, are the most important, and it behoved me at each of these places to light a fresh cigar and drink another glass of wine or indifferent brandy with one or another hospitable Corsican into whose society kind chance led me. When I ventured to remark to one of these friends of a moment that I was surprised to find so much hospitality in his land, he replied quietly, as an effectual rebuff to me, "We are known for it. The Cap Corsicans have their vices like other people, but this is one of their virtues."

Anon I had to share my coupé with two other travellers, a gentleman and a lady. They had been present somewhere at an official banquet the previous evening, and were now returning to their little village adjacent to the place of my destination. From them also I learned that the Cap is the most affable and thrifty part of Corsica, with the best wine. At Mucinaggio, a picturesque little port for Rogliano, a group of villages in the mountains, I walked up and down by the beach with my lady companion, who seemed to think that an Englishman willing to try to talk Italian was a phenomenon of some account. She told me, with raised eyebrows, of one unfortunate compatriot of mine with whom she had conversed—so she phrased it—for a long time without evoking more than a monosyllable from him. "He was a very amiable young man," she assured me, "but it was like drawing a cork to get a word from him."

From this little seaport we rose through delightful woods of olives and chestnut-trees to Rogliano, where we dallied long at the post-office door, and made acquaintance with a few pretty faces. As a rule, there is not much beauty in Corsica. Occasionally one sees very young girls with faces that detain the attention. But the social condition of the island seems to give a hardness to the features before their time, so that the woman of five-and-twenty has the severity of manner of a man of thirty or forty, while the man himself looks as if he were meditating only how he may catch an enemy unawares. There may be fancy in this, but such is the impression one gets. I was told, however, that Cap Corse excels in the beauty of its maidens, even as in its wine and thriftiness. My lady friend of the coupé was my informant, and she herself was no bad illustration of her text.

After ten hours of the cramped, crawling diligence, I was glad to be set free in Morsiglia in the cool twilight. The usual

concourse met the coach, and assailed the conductor with a multitude of questions, to all of which he gave intelligent reply. It was astounding how he could execute their very various commissions as he did, and also those of the half-dozen other villages through which we had passed. "Oh, it is nothing!" said my companion, when I commented on his ability. "The one before him could remember as many again, and he never made a mistake; whereas this one——" The man also engaged to get me settled for the night in this remote little village, with its group of houses all nestling round a couple of old fortresses of the time of the Genoese dominion.

I slept in an isolated house about half a mile out of the village. It was the nearest approach to a hotel possessed by Morsiglia. The building was in charge of a young man and a little boy, and I know not which was the more surprised at my apparition. But for the "say" of the thing, they would have declined to receive me. It was so dark, though, that such a breach of hospitality would have left me little alternative except to sleep under an olive-tree; for the Morsiglia folk retire early. By-and-by, however, we three became sufficiently intimate; and a supper of eggs, and bread, and poor wine was prepared for me. The lad proved a glutton for information, and ingenuously asked me many leading questions about my native land. One thing he objected to: he would not allow that London is the capital of the world.

"There is no city anywhere like Paris," he insisted; "and Paris is the world's capital!"

He would have hunted up his geography manual—compiled in Paris—to convince me, had I not stopped him. Still, he was willing to allow that England had some exemplary features.

"Ah, the Thames!" he exclaimed, with the sigh and gaze of a young religious devotee in pursuit of ideal goodness. "I should like to see that!"

I stared when they led me upstairs to my bed in this poor little house. A trestle support, and a straw mattress with a single blanket, placed in the corner of the common room in the attic, was what I anticipated. Instead of this, I had an apartment with a dressing-table, mirror, pincushion, a solid, polished mahogany bedstead and a feather bed, with all other necessaries, clean as a pink. There is no doubt about it: the Cap Corsicans have their virtues. I was assured of it in the morning, when, after breakfast, I was charged but two shillings for my accommodation; and the good man of the house offered to walk with me ten miles across the mountains, as guide, companion, and friend, and without money consideration.

This was a memorable walk, for the day was exquisite, and the balm of the Cap Corse herbs was in our nostrils all the way. We climbed to the top of the ridge that runs all through the peninsula like a backbone, and then I descended to Santa Severa, where by-and-by I caught a return diligence, and so, amid much dust and under a burning sun, found my way again to Bastia.

Here I was welcomed by the sombre-browed waiter of the "Hôtel de France," who doubted not that I would stay in the house several days. But he knew nothing of the erratic humours and restlessness of the average Briton on his travels. I had heard of a steamer to leave in the night for Livorno, and had taken my ticket for a passage by her.

Several long hours had in the meantime to be occupied in one way or another. As it was Ascension Day, I first of all went to a mass in the cathedral, which is much more pretentious than the cathedral at Ajaccio. The ladies were smitten abominably by the mania for gigantic hats and bonnets, and so the congregation was less interesting than it ought to have been. But the choir and the organ did their work well, and the echoes were stirring.

Outside there was other entertainment. The storm which had hurried the "Desiderade" into Ajaccio had wrecked a schooner against the pier of Bastia, and she had gone to pieces. The "pieces" still lay in mournful disorder, half in the water, and half out. I had read in the newspaper an editorial in which the little boys of Bastia were strenuously implored, for the shipowner's sake, to abstain from pilfering among this attractive medley of casks, and cordage, and bottles, and trusses of soaked hay. All the same, the little boys of Bastia were as busy as ants about the wreck, with their trousers tucked up to the loins.

There is a statue of Napoleon in an open space here as in Ajaccio; and here, as in Ajaccio, the ex-Emperor gazes pensively out to sea. He is looking at Elba, perhaps wondering whether it had not been better for him to have resigned himself to the worship of the few thousand inhabitants of that fair little island. The sculptor has put the globe at his feet—a compliment I

hope he appreciates if he still has cognisance of human things.

I spent the last hour before sunset on the end of Bastia's pier, listening to the hubbub of Bastia's children as they dabbled in the water, and watching the shadows and lights upon the hinder hills, the lagoon to the south, and a shoulder of snow mountain which stood upraised from the middle of the island. There was something sweetly fascinating about this, my last picture in Corsica. The swallows sped fast to and fro across the inner bay, with its shapes of archaic, broad-sterned boats just rising and falling at its sides. I could see the fish in silvery shoals, hovering at the mouth of the harbour. Now and again one would venture in, and anon hasten back to his fellows; then they entered in a troop, and no doubt dined on garbage to their contentment.

All this time the islands of Elba and Capraia were momentarily getting clearer to the view. When the last crimson flush was on the shoulder of snow above mentioned, they were as solid as if they had been but a stone's-cast away. Then the shadows of night came slowly over the town, and the bells of the cathedral church clashed a peal.

A VIRTUE IN ECLIPSE.

It has often been urged by paradoxical thinkers, and by the sceptics of common life, that the fine old crusted wisdom which is dealt out to us in the popular proverb is by no means of uniform quality; that some of it is exceedingly faulty, and, indeed, very little better than folly itself. The virtue of thrift is not held up to praise in any monumental utterance of copybook morality, but there are several current wise saws of minor importance which indirectly say a good word for it: those which tell of early birds which get the worms, and of many mickles which make the muckle, and of the wisdom of storing provision for the rainy day. As a virtue, thrift is worthy of all that has been said of it, and even more. It marks one of those rare instances where the proverb has fallen short and has not said enough in praise of its subject. Perhaps it may be for the lack of this proverbial advertisement that thrift is certainly not a popular quality; or, on the other hand, it may be on account of some want of inherent charm that the framers of proverbs and maxims have given it the cold shoulder.

In spite of the encouragement which has lately been given to a scheme of national assurance for old age, it is to be feared that thrift is none the more popular with us as a nation, or nearer to that high status among the virtues which it enjoys in other lands, and in the estimation of the social reformer everywhere. Times are greatly changed since Mechanics' Institutes were first set going for the regeneration of the worker. Thrift then was the text—the "firstly," and "secondly," and "in conclusion"—of every discourse to which the intelligent operatives were treated on gala occasions, when the magic lantern, and the astronomical machinery, and the air-pump had exhausted their powers of attraction. It may be that, on account of these associations, the hearers did not then take to it; but the mechanic of to-day has other reasons for his distaste. He has discovered that these institutes were designed by certain trading economists, whose school he certainly favours less now than formerly, as places of discipline where the contemporary workers—his father and grandfather—might be indoctrinated with the saving grace of the gospel of cheapness. It was promised to them that their wages should be "good" and "fair"; but goodness and fairness were never properly defined. They were informed that the trade of the country would be ruined, and they themselves along with it, should they ask for more; and, lastly, they were adjured by the shade of Adam Smith to be thrifty, so that they might never be brought to eat the degrading bread of charity, or become an inconvenient burden upon the rates. Our worker of to-day fancies that he espies the cloven foot in this teaching, and bids the apostles of thrift to take their wares to another market.

How rapidly all these beliefs and teachings of a few decades ago are being swept down into the dim abyss of forgotten things! Already many of them are ancient history. The bears in the Regent's Park go on eating the same sort of bun that they have swallowed since the Zoological Gardens were first opened; but Demos is more critical as to his intellectual nutriment than these are as to their buns. Thrift held at the end of a stick will no longer attract him; and he has given notice that he would like to hear something of a doctrine which calls for less self-sacrifice on his part. This distaste may mainly arise on account of the boring he has undergone at the hands of his instructors; but more probably it comes

from the secret preference of all classes of Englishmen for the spendthrift over the save-all. A more popular character than Charles Surface never trod the boards; and the fact that there would be no room for men like him in the new social state, constructed after the model of the Fabian Society, is the surest guarantee that such a state will never come into existence. Englishmen would never take kindly to a world in which there would be no borrowing nor lending, where men would be all Francis Goodchilds, with no Tom Idles.

Thrift, in short, has not within it the makings of a popular virtue; and it may be doubted whether it would have fared any better had it been made the subject of ever so many proverbial sayings. It is not the informing spirit of any one of our leading institutions. Governmental departments know nothing of it; and no one has ever accused our ancient seats of learning of "cultivating literature on a few oats." Very advanced politicians, even, who may happen also to be on the livery of a City company, have been known to speak tenderly of the Ancient Corporation of London—a thriftless body, if ever there was one. Again, it has been taught too exclusively by precept; there has been too little of attractive example; and, in truth, examples of this sort are not very easy to find. The man who is always mindful of that rainy day, who is always hesitating whether or not he shall spend sixpence, is not, as a rule, the pleasantest of companions, though we may admit that his scheme of life has its merits. We respect Francis Goodchild, but we are not quite sure that we like him. We certainly haven't a particle of respect for Tom Idle, but we are a bit sorry for him, and now and then make excuses for his peccadillos, and speculate whether he may not, after all, be merely a martyr to Atavism, or to some untoward surroundings.

It is certain that mere thrift may fail to win for those who practise it the rewards which too often crown the exhibition of qualities immeasurably inferior to it, qualities opposed to it in every possible way. Men who have been thrifty all their lives, are sometimes left bare by a sudden stroke of adverse fortune; and many of these often get scant help, or pity either, from those who might very well play the good Samaritan to them, for the simple reason that they have given too much time to money-grubbing, and too little to the cultivation of those arts, proficiency in which often makes the life of an impecunious man anything but an unhappy one. It is a great thing to learn the trick of always falling upon one's feet, of knowing where to look for open purses into which to dip when the hour for drawing cheques is past. No better example of this class could be produced than Mr. Algernon Lomax, a gentleman whose acquaintance I made in the course of some speculative investment business in the City some ten years ago. Lomax then had a house in Queen's Gate, and a fine place on the river, and horses, and carriages, and servants in due proportion. Though as an entertainer he had little in the way of manners to boast of, his wines and cuisine were choice enough to atone for this deficiency, and his whole household was well done in every detail, so well that people, who were described as "smart" in the society papers, went in crowds whenever they were bidden, either to Queen's Gate or to the "Alders." Indeed, as far as I can judge, I never saw anybody who was not "smart" amongst Lomax's guests except myself and Mr. and Mrs. Schultz.

Schultz was an Anglo-German of the commercial traveller type, but his wife was emphatically English, and speaking the English of—let us say—Marylebone. He had retired from business, in what line he had operated it was never disclosed, with a comfortable fortune, and Mrs. Schultz also had a nice little income of her own. There was also a little reservation as to her antecedents. Some people affirmed they had seen her, sometime in the sixties, on the stage, not in an acting part; and others hinted of music-halls; but they did not care to make themselves nasty on the business, as she was such a good, kind soul, and never gave herself airs of any sort. Of all the people who tasted Mr. Lomax's splendid hospitality none enjoyed it half as much as this worthy couple, and yet the host certainly did not put himself out to entertain them. He made them welcome and left them to shift for themselves, and they were perfectly happy in the consciousness that they were breathing the same air and sitting at the same table with the Hon. Miss Merridew and Captain Stallybrass, though these illustrious ornaments of society never gave sign of recognising their existence. Once, however, in the smoking-room, the Captain elaborated, to two or three choice spirits, the witticism that Schultz must be the broker who had furnished the place for Lomax at a low

rate on condition that he should have a month's run of the house during the summer. Mrs. Lomax, who was supposed to have made somewhat of a mésalliance in her marriage, always treated them with haughty contempt; but Lomax would always smooth matters down whenever his lady had been unduly aggressive. He had a game of his own to play, and very cleverly he played it. Year after year Mr. and Mrs. Schultz repaired to the "Alders" for the regulation four weeks, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly in their own humble way, till at last the bolt fell, and struck both the roofs of Queen's Gate and the "Alders," and put a sudden end to the splendid hospitalities of Mr. Algernon Lomax.

For the career of this worthy was short and dazzling. After living well beyond his income—and that a most precarious one — for six years, and indulging in "flutters" on all the big races, and finally owning a horse or two himself, the inevitable crash came. Very few of the people, who knew him either in the City or in private life, were surprised or sorry. Mrs. Lomax had good settlements, not all antenuptial it was whispered, so there was no danger of the workhouse; but Lomax would, assuredly, have had to go there, had he been forced to depend entirely on the good offices of his "smart" acquaintance. He knew his world too well to waste his breath in asking help from any of them. He had given them entertainment in exchange for their company and countenance. They had carried out their part of the bargain, and he would have no cause of complaint if Captain Stallybrass should let him starve for want of twopence to buy a loaf; but all his guests were not of the Captain's sort. According to his reckoning, the accounts of some of them showed a balance in his favour. Schultz was the chief of them, and Lomax decided that the time had now come when he must ask Schultz to pay up.

Lomax was a student of character, and he was likewise a high proficient in the art of falling easily. He had not selected Mr. and Mrs. Schultz to sit at his table, year after year, for nothing. He recognised them—Mrs. Schultz especially—as belonging to that particular class which must have been specially designed to supplement the needs of persons like himself; and his estimate proved correct. They had been dazzled by his splendour, and flattered by his patronage, during the brief day of prosperity, and were awestricken by the magnitude of the catastrophe when it came. They ran to him, tremblingly eager with their proffers of help, so that Lomax afterwards, like Lord Clive when the wealth of the Indies lay uncounted around him, was astonished at his moderation. As it was, the whole Lomax family took refuge at the Villa Schultz, and remained there for six months at free quarters. Mrs. Lomax was suffering with nervous prostration, and required so much attention, that extra service had to be engaged for her especially, and a smart landau was hired for her use. Lomax found life almost insupportable without a certain brand of Dry Champagne—rather a costly one—and Schultz at once laid in a supply of it. He likewise made several pecuniary advances on the personal security of his guest. Then, when at last Lomax found a place in the country which would suit him, within reach of a little quiet hunting, where he might lie by till the time should be ripe for a fresh flight, the two girls, who had latterly been taught to call Schultz uncle, were left behind on a visit which has not yet come to an end. The nerves of Mrs. Lomax being still in a shattered condition, Mrs. Schultz has seen to the dear girls' new dresses, and other matters of the sort. Furthermore, it has been arranged that Frank, the only son and the family hope of the house of Lomax, shall spend all his holidays at the Villa Schultz. He is an idle, mischievous brat, with vicious inclinations, uncouth and odious as the children of parents of the Lomax type must be; but he has completely won Mrs. Schultz's heart, and made her his devoted slave. Whenever he goes back to school, which is generally ten days after term begins, he has twice as much pocket-money as any other boy; and it is suspected that once Mrs. Schultz added to her other gifts a meerschaum pipe, upon which she knew her dear boy's heart was set, and a pound of bird's-eye for consumption therein. She thinks that there never was such a fine, open-handed, high-spirited boy, and is even anxious to adopt him formally; but she has not yet ventured to suggest to his parents to part with their treasure.

Now Schultz has a brother living at Homerton, a worthy, industrious fellow, who is still slaving at a small salary in the same business which gave his brother his comfortable retiring competence. He

manages to live decently, and even to put by a little. The brothers are on good terms, and greet one another cordially when they meet, which is, on an average, about twice a year; but I am informed that Schultz never gives to his brother, or to any of his numerous nephews and nieces, a penny-piece, nor do any of them ever sit at his board or enjoy his bounty in any way.

The young people at Homerton, I hear, are admirably brought up, in spite of the narrowness of the household; and I cannot help thinking that if their aunt and uncle, being childless, really wanted youthful society, they would have done far better to have adopted one or more of these than to have burdened themselves with the booby whose future they have virtually made themselves responsible for. And then a five-pound note, deducted from the heavy Lomax advances, might have been sent to Homerton at Christmas, where it would have been very welcome.

Schultz is naturally an upright, kind-hearted man, and he would certainly resent it keenly if any one were to tell him that he was acting unjustly in postponing his brother's interests so completely in favour of those of the Lomax family. He is, no doubt, a firm adherent of the view that every man has the right to do what he likes with his own, and it may be that he is merely asserting this view in the line he takes; but the more probable explanation of his conduct is that Lomax, though thriftless, has the art to fascinate and interest him, and to compel him to open his purse; while his brother, though thrifty to the backbone, is thrifty and nothing else, and therefore incapable of enlisting sympathy or assistance. It would assuredly have been more profitable to Schultz junior if he had cultivated some of the arts of Lomax, even though he might have been forced, on this account, to sacrifice some few pounds of his laborious savings.

CATHERINE MAIDMENT'S BURDEN.

A STORY IN TWELVE CHAPTERS.

BY MARGARET MOULE.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FORTNIGHT had gone by since the terrible night which Catherine, after her brother's outbreak, had spent lying dressed on her bed.

In that fortnight it was as if ten years had been added to her life. For, with that outbreak, the last remnant of self-restraint that Frank Maidment possessed had apparently left him; and he seemed to give himself up, utterly and helplessly, to the power of his own uncontrolled will, and, day by day, to lose more of every quality that had gone to making up his real, better self. He kept himself perfectly sober during the day. It would have been impossible to find out—from his demeanour, when he was out of doors, getting through a semblance of his daily work, or rather, such of it as he could not leave for Catherine to do—the shame and self-indulgence of his secret life. He was quiet, self-possessed, and silent. His face during these days was white and haggard, his eyes were dim and heavy, with dark lines beneath. But the Moreford people, and Mr. Stewart-Carr, who, more than once, on meeting Frank Maidment, stopped him and rallied him on his looks, accepted unquestioningly his own explanation; he felt the heat, he said.

But, in the evenings, when he was in his own house, and the chances of intercourse with the outside world were very few and slight, he seemed to throw away his quiet demeanour, his silence, and his every remnant of better feeling together.

He never again became quite so uproarious; it affected him differently. It seemed to confirm him in a certain heavy hopelessness that hung about him, and it was almost as if he drank from a positive desire to stupefy himself.

Catherine struggled to lift the weight from him; all in vain. Night after night she tried with untiring patience to rouse him, to keep temptation out of his reach, and to distract his mind. All these efforts were utterly in vain. He would not be roused; he only shrank away further into his morose, evidently wretched self, and sank into a sort of defiant sullenness towards her. And though she watched him intently and kept what guard she could on him through every one of her waking hours, there were no means by which she could keep temptation utterly out of his reach, since she could give no orders outside the house for his protection against himself—to do so would have been to proclaim the secret she kept so jealously. Her attempts to distract his mind were quite as hopeless.

Frank loved music, and in other days he had been very fond of listening to Cathe-

rine's songs and proud of her sweet voice. But now, when she sang to him, before the song was half-way through, she would suddenly become aware that he had left the room; and she would have to go after him, find him, and begin her weary coaxing and persuading all over again. She played cribbage with him, and taught herself chess with infinite pains because he had once said that he liked it. But he would only go through about half the game, then he would throw the pieces aside, and if Catherine left him for an instant, the evening would end as the evening before it, and the one before that, had ended.

Ever since the terrible evening which had been the beginning of this long fortnight, the incoherent words that her brother had spoken about Grace Arbuthnot had been in Catherine's mind. She thought of them over and over again. Could it be possible, she wondered, that any hopeless fancy for Miss Arbuthnot had taken possession of him? This thought once raised in her mind, various details came to confirm it. She remembered several occasions since Miss Arbuthnot's fall on which he had spoken of her, incidentally, apparently, and had seemed to notice her comings and goings. He had told her also of the walk he had had with Grace Arbuthnot to the Castle after he had helped her out of her difficulties in her search for water-lilies; and though Catherine had thought little of it at the time, his short, curt manner in the telling recurred significantly to her now. She learned by accident that the report of Grace Arbuthnot's engagement to Mr. Stewart-Carr had come to her brother's knowledge on that same day on which she herself had heard it. And that was the day the evening of which had seen his terrible outbreak.

Frank had been worse, she told herself, sadly, ever since Mr. Stewart-Carr's return. Since he had known Miss Arbuthnot he had been worse still, and this last fortnight had been the worst of all. He had sunk lower, it seemed to poor Catherine, than she had known that it was possible for him to sink. Nothing—no prayers, no longings, no entreaties of hers—could touch him now.

One long hour after another of the dreary days went by; and gradually one growing conviction shaped itself in her mind—the conviction that she and her brother must leave Moreford.

If it were really true that the thought of Miss Arbuthnot had helped to bring him so low, Catherine knew that days must come which would bring him lower yet. Miss Arbuthnot would one day be established at the Castle as its mistress, and it would be impossible, she told herself, for Frank to remain in Moreford then. In the excitement and emotion of such a position he would certainly get utterly beyond his own or her control, and Mr. Stewart-Carr would find it all out; and Catherine was resolved, with all the force of her strong, resolute will, that that last should never happen. Mr. Stewart-Carr should never know. She never questioned herself as to her reasons for this determination; all the thoughts that had been with her as she walked from Mrs. Wilson's cottage, after hearing there of Mr. Stewart-Carr's reported engagement to Grace Arbuthnot, had been burnt out of her by what had met her on her arrival at home. She did not even realise how strong an incentive was this resolution to her in the fight which her daily life had become.

It seemed to her that she was always meeting Mr. Stewart-Carr now; that he was beginning to be far too well aware of the work she did on the estate. If there were a piece of business to be done, peculiarly ill-suited to a woman, she was certain to meet him while she was about it. Much of the work that had become, from habit, a simple matter of course to her before he came, seemed to her now, in her consciousness of what he would think, if he could know who attended to it, unwomanly and difficult. She was haunted always by the fear that he should find out all she did, and why. But day by day she began to feel it more and more difficult to guard against this at all points. She felt her strength getting less, her power to keep her secret weaker. She worked early and late at all of her brother's work which he could not, or did not choose to do, she wore a cheerful face before the world, she kept everything going just as usual; but, behind it all, a terrible worn-out feeling was creeping over her—she knew that she could not hold out much longer.

She was thinking it all over one afternoon—she rarely thought of anything else when she was alone—as she walked slowly home from a long errand in the hot, scorching sun. She had just come to the conclusion that she must not rely upon her own fortitude any longer, and that the only thing to be done was to take her brother away from Moreford at once, and see if any hope was to be found in making

a fresh start in a fresh place. Her heavy heart grew a little lighter in the relief of coming to any decision, and she walked with a less weary step as she tried to arrange how best to put this decision to her brother, and get him to acquiesce in it.

She was still a long way from the White House, and she left the road for a path on the grass by its side, under some elms, which, though the very trees were dusty and their leaves were drooping in the great heat, seemed more inviting than the white, glaring road. She had walked along in the shade for about five minutes, when she was startled by the quick, dull sound of a horse's hoofs on the grass. She turned round mechanically, saw that a man, riding a chestnut horse, was behind her, and prepared, equally mechanically, to move out of his way. But, before she could do so, the sound ceased. The rider had dismounted, and, twisting his horse's bridle over his arm, had taken a few quick strides that brought him up to her side.

"Miss Maidment!" he said.

Catherine turned very suddenly at the sound of the voice, and found herself confronted by Mr. Stewart-Carr.

"Did I startle you?" he said, anxiously.

"No, oh no!" she said, collecting her senses and recovering herself on the instant. "I heard your horse. But when I looked round I did not see that it was you."

"I hope you are not displeased to find it is?" he said, gravely; and in spite of his grave manner, something in his tone sent an odd little thrill through Catherine, and, though it did not revive, stirred faintly those thoughts that had been, apparently, burnt out of her life.

"Why should I be displeased?" she said, simply. "I am very glad to have a break in this long road. It is a longer road than I thought it was!" she added, with a slight smile.

"You have walked far?" he said, interrogatively.

She hesitated. She knew he meant to ask whether she had been at work. That feeling of dread, lest he should find out all the significance of her work, swept over her in a great wave, and for the moment she felt as if she could not answer him. The errand she had done was perfectly simple, and in its nature quite within a woman's power. But something, perhaps the slight thrill his first words had caused her, had disturbed her hold on herself; and it was with a curious consciousness in her tone, that she said, without looking at him:

"Yes. I have been to Fisher's."

"About the new fences?"

"Yes. He has delayed so very long in beginning them, that my brother thought something ought to be done. So I roused him a little, I hope. Fisher takes an immense amount of rousing, as you know." And she gave a little laugh that was a trifle unreal, as she spoke. "But he will really begin work on Monday."

"Has Mr. Maidment seen him about it, before?"

"I have," she said, slowly.

Mr. Stewart-Carr did not answer at once. He played with his horse's bridle, twisting it into awkward knots, as he walked by Catherine's side. Then he said, abruptly:

"Miss Maidment, pardon me. I ought not to say what I am going to, perhaps. You may possibly think it most uncalled for, on my part; but I have wished to say it to you for some days, many days, in fact. Do you not think you give yourself unnecessary labour, and rather—forgive me for speaking so plainly—spoil your brother by doing so much of his work for him?"

Catherine started. Her hand clasped tighter round the handle of the sunshade she was holding.

"Don't misunderstand me," he went on, very eagerly; "don't think for a moment that I underrate your powers, or that I fail to appreciate the perfect order in which everything is and has been kept. I know how excellent the help you give him is. But," he said, with a smile, "I have the greatest possible respect for Mr. Maidment's powers also. And it seems to me a pity that they should be, so to speak, enervated by too much help."

But no answering smile came from Catherine. She grew icy cold, and the hand that held her sunshade clung to it with a grasp of iron.

"If——," he began, in a thoughtful tone, "if your brother thinks that the work of the estate is really too much for one man, he has only to tell me and I would most gladly get proper assistance for him. Surely he knows that I would. What I so greatly dislike is the thought that the work falls on your shoulders—so unnecessarily."

There was a longer pause, and Catherine made herself look up, made herself speak.

"The necessity is greater than you think," she said. "I—my brother is very

far from strong, and he feels the work really more than he can get through without my help."

"Then let me get a competent assistant at once," Mr. Stewart-Carr said, quickly.

"I am afraid that would be of no avail," Catherine said, quietly. She wondered mechanically as she spoke what had happened to her voice; it sounded so cold and so far-away. "I fear—indeed I am sure—that it will be necessary for my brother to resign his post here; he finds himself unequal to it. I have had no final consultation with him as yet; but he will, I believe, write to you on the subject without delay."

"Resign his post!" exclaimed Mr. Stewart-Carr in undisguised amazement. "Miss Maidment, I do trust your brother does not seriously contemplate such a step; I cannot tell you how I value his services, nor how distressed I should be to lose him."

He stopped short, and a perplexed frown came on his brow; he turned quite round to face Catherine, and stood still. He looked straight towards her but he could not see her face. She held her sunshade so that it was hidden from his eyes. "Miss Maidment," he said, very earnestly, "you cannot—it is not possible that I—that you have misunderstood me in any way—that this is a sudden determination taken by you because of anything I may have said, or failed to say. I express myself horribly awkwardly, always," he added humbly, almost deprecatingly.

Catherine raised her sunshade and he could see her face. It was white, and it looked thinner, somehow, than usual.

"No, indeed," she said, in a tone quite as eager as his own; "no, indeed, you must not think that. It is no sudden resolve. I—my brother has been really unequal to his work for some time; and there is no course open to him but to give it up, I assure you."

Catherine walked on more quickly as she spoke, and he, perforce, followed her example.

"I am deeply concerned to hear it," he said," and then he paused for a moment, thoughtfully. "Have you thought of trying a change, a rest for him, Miss Maidment?" he went on. "It sometimes works wonders. I could quite easily get some one to see after the work for a time—I'll do so to-morrow, if you will let me."

"You are very good," Catherine answered, with a little, almost imperceptible quiver in her voice, "very good; but, indeed, we cannot make any temporary arrangement. Don't think me ungrateful for your kind consideration—I am not, indeed. But it will be best for him to give it up."

Catherine was beginning to get terribly afraid of her voice; the long, hot walk, the strain of her whole position, and another thing that she did not realise, the still abiding presence of those thoughts which had seemed burnt out of her life, told upon her endurance. They had left the high road and entered a lane, and she rapidly made up her mind to end the interview by taking a short cut from there across the fields, which Mr. Stewart-Carr would be unable to follow on horseback. "This is my nearest way," she said, standing still again at the gate which would lead her into the first field. "My brother—Frank will write or speak to you himself. Good-bye," and she held out her hand.

Mr. Stewart-Carr took it; he held it for a moment or two firmly, looking into her face, which she could not well conceal from him now.

"Good-bye," he said, slowly. "I do trust your brother will reconsider his decision."

Then he loosed her hand, and Catherine passed through the small gate, and was immediately hidden from his sight by the hedge.

Left alone, Mr. Stewart-Carr did not remount his horse. He threw the bridle over the gatepost and stood leaning against a large tree that grew beside it, his arms folded, and his head bent. The lane was a very lonely one, and there was no great likelihood of the approach of any passer-by. But any one who had chanced to arrive would have been surprised at the expression on Mr. Stewart-Carr's face as he stood there alone. He looked very anxious, and deeply agitated. All the lines of his pleasant face were broken up by strong, unwonted emotion. He was thinking, and thinking very intently.

The village report of his engagement to Grace Arbuthnot was, like most reports of the kind, so premature as to be absolutely untrue. It was nearly a month since his first attempt to propose to her, during their interview about the fishing-rods, in his room; and though all the other guests except Captain Carnforth, who stayed on on one pretext or another, had left, Mrs. Arbuthnot's slight accident

and consequent indisposition had kept her and her daughter still at the Castle. During this month, it is hardly necessary to say, many other opportunities of proposing to her had come in his way; but he had let them all go by, without attempting to use them, or attempting to alter much further the still extremely simple and friendly relations subsisting between Grace and himself. He could not tell why he had done this. He, indeed, had never asked himself. He had just gone on, from day to day, thinking every night, indefinitely, that he would propose next day, and thinking every morning that he would still wait. But not until this very afternoon, half an hour before, had the true reason of his apparent procrastination and delay taken definite shape in his mind. Now, however, he understood it perfectly well; saw it before him in the clearest possible light And he only wondered, helplessly and half-contemptuously, why he had not realised it long before. He had known, for the first time, when she spoke to him of leaving Moreford, that he could not propose to another woman because he was in love with Catherine Maidment.

Little by little, as he stood there, thinking, it all grew clear before him. He knew how Catherine's quiet, gracious, womanly manner had impressed itself upon him at their first meeting. He remembered how he had left the White House that day with a strong feeling of attraction towards her in his mind; he remembered their interview in the library, he remembered the hot afternoon under the mulberry-tree, and he understood all at once, now, how it was that that afternoon had stood out so persistently in his memory through the month that had elapsed since then. He remembered all their many chance meetings. As if he were unconsciously obliged to recount them every one, one after another they recurred to his mind with vivid clearness. He knew now, that, as after every one he seemed to know her a little better, and the thought of her seemed more and more a part of his daily life, he had been growing all the time not only to like her, but to love her.

Mr. Stewart-Carr's love was characteristic. It had never been waked to life before by any woman. But it was there, below his controlled, ordinary self, deep and strong; a force the strength of which he himself neither gauged nor realised as yet.

Each moment, however, as he thought of her, there in the lonely lane, his love for Catherine Maidment rose higher and higher above that ordinary self, till he felt as if, then and there, in that hour, his whole life were being changed by it. Every line of her face, every tone of her voice, every gesture of hers, came before him with scrupulous exactness; and every detail seemed more perfect than the one before. So vivid was the picture his newly-arisen love created for him, of the woman who inspired it, that he suddenly let fall his arms, turned to the gate and looked over it, feeling as if she must be actually there.

But Catherine was entering the White House at the moment, with a very heavy, aching heart, little dreaming of the part she was playing in Mr. Stewart-Carr's life.

With his sudden movement towards the gate, the current of his thoughts seemed to receive a check—something cut across them and stemmed the tide that was rising so fast and so forcibly within him. He remembered Grace Arbuthnot. Before this hour, in which he had learned, as he told himself, what love was, he had believed that he could be very happy with her. He had intended, fully intended, to ask her to be his wife. He had asked her and her mother to his house with that end before him. He had so treated her as to give rise to reports—he knew of their existence well enough—that she was already engaged to him.

The thought came to him like icy cold water on a burning flame. Was he in honour bound to put away for ever the love he had only just realised? Was he, or was he not, bound to Grace Arbuthnot?

As he realised the whole position, he laid his arms along the top of the high gate and let his head fall on them, with a sigh that was very nearly a groan.

When he lifted it, half an hour later, there was no change in the heavy trouble and perplexity of his face, and the question was still as utterly undecided in his mind as when he first began to think it out. He looked at his watch hurriedly, and finding it was seven o'clock, mounted his horse and rode rapidly away in the direction of the Castle.

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